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The New Perspectives of Health Promoting Schools development – Current Situation in Europe and Poland

Abstract

The World Health Organization has proposed many different activities in the field of health promotion during the last 20 years, including activities concerning children and youth. These kinds of actions in many European countries caused the emergence of health promoting schools. Efforts to create health promoting schools in Poland have been undertaken since 1992. This article concentrates on issues connected with functioning of health promoting schools network in Poland and Europe. It examines the perspectives of SHE (Schools for Health in Europe) development, in the context of European as well as Polish conditions and possibilities of implementation.

Key words: *health promotion schools, health education, Schools for Health in Europe.*

Health promotion is a new conception and strategy of activities for health. It originated at the end of the last century, together with the movement “Health for all in the year 2000,” and its basic assumptions were formulated during the first Health Promotion Conference in Ottawa, in 1986. The foundation of the Health Promoting Schools Network was a significant aspect of this conception. The network was created by three international organizations: The WHO Regional Office for Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Commission (Woynarowska, 1999, p. 381; Parsons, Stears, Thomas, 1996).

In 2008 the founders of The European Network of Health Promoting Schools (ENHPS) decided to transform it into Schools for Health in Europe (SHE). Cur-

rently the SHE secretariat is located at the Netherlands Institute for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NIGZ) and has the status of a WHO Collaborating Centre for School Health Promotion (newsletter "Szkoły dla Zdrowia w Europie," no.1, June 2007 <http://www.cmppp.edu.pl/files/Biuletyn%20SHE%20Nr%201,%202007.doc>). SHE has well established links with the international organizations mentioned above – these organizations are members of the SHE advisory board. The strategic plan for SHE has been ratified at the 2nd SHE assembly meeting held in Egmond aan Zee, the Netherlands, in February 2009.

SHE builds on the work of ENHPS and provides an open network which will further develop health promotion in schools in Europe by providing a platform for specific developments in areas such as the evidence base for health promotion in schools and teacher education in school health promotion. The tasks of the Schools for Health in Europe network are to:

- identify and share relevant information on school health;
- encourage research;
- share good practice, expertise and skills;
- act as advocates for school health promotion.

The main aim of Schools for Health in Europe network (SHE) is to support organizations and professionals to further develop and sustain school health promotion in each country by providing the European platform for school health promotion (report "Schools for Health in Europe network," <http://www.schoolsfor-health.eu/upload/SHEstrategicplan20082012.pdf>, 24.09.2009). To realize the main aim, SHE established a number of strategic objectives (for the period 2008–2012), such as:

1. FROM SHE NETWORK TO SHE COMMUNITY – maintain, and expand SHE to a leading international network and community for school health promotion;
2. DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION – support the development, implementation and research (evaluation/evidence) of school health promotion;
3. TECHNICAL SUPPORT – provide ongoing technical support in member states, with an emphasis on the member countries in Eastern Europe and the Central Asian Republics (EECA countries);
4. LINKS WITH EDUCATION SECTOR AND OTHER SECTORS – create and maintain active collaboration with the education sector and other relevant sectors (youth care, social care, environment and sustainable development) at an international level;

5. VISIBILITY AND OWNERSHIP – increase the visibility of SHE network (report “Schools for Health in Europe network,” <http://www.schoolsfor-health.eu/upload/SHEstrategicplan20082012.pdf>, 24.09.2009).

Practical realization of the above-mentioned objectives will be possible by using the following methods:

- to act as a platform for professionals active in the area of school health promotion,
- to stimulate professional exchange on theoretical, conceptual and methodological development in the area of school health promotion, including research and good practice,
- to facilitate exchange of learning and practice between individual schools and students in different member countries as appropriate
- to stimulate the development and extension of partnerships between the health sector, the education sector, the youth care sector and other appropriate sectors at the European and national level.

SHE as a network involved in health promotion has several serious challenges:

- *From network to community* – within this concept of the network SHE wishes to build an open, active participatory community rather than a closed hierarchical structure. This will create more ownership of what SHE can offer to all its members.
- *Spreading awareness of SHE* – SHE will seek to increase the awareness of being a network operating at a European level by utilizing the networking skills of its coordinators and in utilizing the potential of electronic communications.
- *Limited access to information* – there is a rich body of knowledge and experience on school health promotion available within the network but access to this information is somewhat limited. SHE needs to create better visibility for the target group, both SHE coordinators and professionals and policy makers with an interest in school health promotion. Special attention needs to be given to policy makers to advocate school health promotion.
- *From health topics to better education* – over the years the focus in school health promotion has shifted from health topics (smoking, eating, sex, mental health) to the inclusion of health as part of school policies and plans.
- *Marketing* – the marketing of school health promotion by SHE can be improved by a clear and simple core message, a concise description and definition of school health promotion and of the tasks of SHE. A new website will help to achieve this goal.

- *Diversity* – each of the 43 member countries has its own education and health systems; SHE acknowledges these differences and where appropriate will seek to utilize these as a resource for all the countries in developing the European dimension of school health promotion.

Communication – communication among the SHE coordinators takes place in the English language but it is the first language of only a small minority. This poses an extra challenge for improving communication among the members of the SHE network (report “Schools for Health in Europe network,” <http://www.schoolsforhealth.eu/upload/SHEstrategicplan20082012.pdf>, 24.09.2009).

Members of the SHE network are coordinators, research group, advisory board, planning committee, HEPS partners and the stakeholders are:

- school aged children and young people,
- school managers and health promotion coordinators,
- school coordinators,
- school staff,
- school boards,
- local community,
- ministries of health, ministries of education, all other relevant ministries,
- policy makers (global, European, national, regional, local),
- related European networks (including European Youth Forum, European Parent Organization, teachers unions, European School Headmasters Association),
- national networks of school health promotion,
- regional networks of school health promotion,
- researchers in the area of school health promotion,
- professionals working in the area of school health promotion,
- funding organizations – public and private (report “Schools for Health in Europe network,” <http://www.schoolsforhealth.eu/upload/SHEstrategicplan20082012.pdf>, 24.09.2009).

SHE uses a positive concept of health and well-being and acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Woynarowska, Stepniak, 2002, p.6). The SHE approach for school health promotion in Europe is based on the following five core values and five pillars which are a source of inspiration and provide a basis for health promoting school development.

The five SHE core values are : equity, sustainability, inclusion, empowerment and action competence, democracy.

Equity means that health promoting schools ensure equal access for all to the full range of educational and health opportunities. In this way they have the potential to reduce inequalities in health.

Sustainability comes from acknowledging that health, education and development are closely linked. Schools act as centres of academic learning and support to develop a responsible and positive view on pupils' future role in society. Health promoting schools develop best when efforts and achievements are implemented in a systematic way for a prolonged period – outcomes (both in health and education) mostly occur in the medium or long term (at least 5–7 years).

Inclusion stands for celebrating diversity and ensures that schools are communities of learning, where everyone feels trusted and respected – good relationships among pupils, between pupils and school staff and between school, parents and the school community are important.

Empowerment and Action Competence is based on enabling children, young people and all members of the school community to be actively involved in setting health-related aims and in taking actions at the school and community level, to reach these aims.

Democracy means that health promoting schools are based on democratic values and they practise the exercising of rights and taking responsibility.

The five SHE pillars that underpin the health promoting school approach are: whole school approach to health, participation, school quality, evidence, schools and communities.

Whole school approach to health stands for coherence between the school's policies and practices in the following areas:

- a participatory and action-oriented approach to health education in the curriculum;
- taking into account the student's own concept of health,
- developing healthy school policies,
- developing the physical and social environment of the school,
- developing life competences,
- making effective links with home and the community,
- making efficient use of health services.

A sense of ownership is fostered by the student, staff and parent through *participation* and meaningful engagement, which is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of health promoting activities in schools.

School quality means better teaching and learning processes, which gives better effectiveness. Health promoting schools support schools in achieving their educational and social goals. The school's main task is maximizing school outcomes.

There is *evidence*, based on existing and emerging research focused on effective approaches and practice, that school health promotion is effective both on health topics (e.g. mental health, eating, substance use), and on the whole-school approach.

Schools and communities means that health promoting schools are part of the surrounding community – they endorse active collaboration between the school and the community and are active agents in strengthening social capital and health literacy (report “Schools for Health in Europe network”, <http://www.schoolsfor-health.eu/upload/ SHEstrategicplan20082012.pdf>, 24.09.2009).

The conception of school health promotion has been realized in Poland since 1992. At the beginning the project was implemented in 14 primary schools, which applied voluntarily. In 1995 the program was realized in 350 schools of different types, in 23 provinces. In 1998 there were 31 province networks, uniting 600 schools and different educational institutions. At the moment the number of health promoting schools belonging to the network in each province is (<http://www.cmppp.edu.pl/node/8636>, 24.09.2009):

- pomorskie – 89
- zachodnio-pomorskie 122
- warmińsko – mazurskie – 150
- podlaskie – 42
- kujawsko-pomorskie – 25
- lubuskie – 98
- wielkopolskie 74
- łódzkie – 239
- mazowieckie – 48
- lubelskie – 232
- dolnośląskie – 149
- opolskie – 106
- śląskie – 300
- świętokrzyskie – 82
- małopolskie – 245
- podkarpackie – 370.

The institutions coordinating activities undertaken by health promoting schools in different provinces are: school superintendent's offices (10), teacher training centres (5) and public health centre(1) (<http://www.cmppp.edu.pl/node/29145>, 24.09.2009).

Admission to the network requires satisfying the following conditions:

1. Initial conditions:

- a) undertaking activities connected with health promotion in school and community,
 - b) open access to changes,
 - c) acceptance for the conception of school health promotion by the headmaster and educational board,
 - d) creative involvement in the realization of health education curriculum.
2. Preparatory period (1–3 years):
 - a) coming into contact with province coordinator,
 - b) resolution of educational board,
 - c) making an application.

During the preparatory period it is necessary to:

 - arrange training about health promotion for the educational board,
 - appoint a school coordinator and team of health promotion,
 - undertake systemic activities concerning health promotion: diagnosis, planning, realization, evaluation,
 - constantly monitor the school community's well – being,
 - prepare a report.
3. Access to the province network – takes place after satisfying the following conditions:
 - a) 60% members of the school community want to join the province network,
 - b) presentation of a report including:
 - the results of diagnosis, description of project implementation and evaluation,
 - description of the school community's acceptance for the conception of school health promotion,
 - health education program,
 - information about cooperation with parents and local community,
 - information about school community training,
 - description of school coordinator and health promotion team work,
 - information about monitoring of school community's well – being,
 - description of the possibilities of cooperation with health care institutions,
 - additional documentation (photos, video, CD).

A school is included in the province network after satisfying the above-mentioned conditions and evaluation (<http://www.cmppp.edu.pl/node/8640>, 24.09.2009).

According to the presented description of health promotion schools functioning in Europe and Poland there is hope that SHE's core message "We all care about our children, they are the future of Europe. Every child in Europe has the right to education, health and security and should have the opportunity to be educated in a health promoting school" will be effectively implemented.

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